

## Book Note

### The Increasing Scope of Behavior Analysis: A Review of *School Social Work*

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There are between 8,000 and 12,000 professionally trained school social workers in the United States who are dedicated to identifying "barriers to learning either for an individual child or a group of children in similar situations, and [who] then attempt to modify those obstacles" (Costin, 1987, p. 539). Considering that school social workers are active in a variety of areas in which applied behavior analysis has much to offer, it is somewhat surprising that a book like *School Social Work* by Evelyn Ginsburg has not been written earlier. Among the professional activities performed by school social workers are individual counseling of academically or behaviorally disturbed pupils, the investigation of suspected child abuse, attempts to ameliorate truancy and its causes (e.g., lack of lunch money, warm clothing, shoes), consulting with teachers regarding methods of classroom management, liaison with families and community agencies, facilitating student support groups, conducting social assessments, and providing family counseling.

Prior books on school social work have taken a variety of conceptual perspectives, with the so-called systems theory and ecological perspectives predominating. *School Social Work* breaks from this tradition by advocating applied behavior analysis as the preferred approach in working with troubled youth in school settings. *School Social Work* has 228 pages divided into 14 chapters. The four

major parts of the book are titled "The Child," "The School," "Methods," and "Case Studies." Part I on the child reviews the multitude of psychosocial influences giving rise to a child's behavior, both normal and dysfunctional, including parents and families, peer groups, teachers, and racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. In conducting an assessment of a child referred for school social work services, Ginsburg comes close to describing the processes of behavioral diagnostics advocated by Bailey and Pyles (1989). Briefly stated, this involves the systematic and empirical investigation of more parsimonious potential causes of problematic behavior (e.g., health problems, language difficulties, differing cultural expectations). These potential *antecedents* to behavior should be addressed prior to implementing more complex behavioral programming which may involve manipulating the *consequences* of a targeted behavior in the absence of an adequate understanding of the originating elements giving rise to the problem.

Part II, covering the school environment, contains a politically insightful description of the various activities public schools are responsible for, political and power relationships among various professional groups (school social workers, teachers, administrators, school psychologists, nurses, etc.), and relevant federal legislation impacting the practice of social work in the schools (e.g., PL 94-142, PL 98-199, the Civil Rights Act of 1964). Sections of Part II are devoted to the practice of school social work in special education and the unique problems presented by students who have mental retardation or other developmental disabilities. This section reflects, as does the

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*School Social Work* by Evelyn H. Ginsburg was published by Charles C Thomas, Publishers in 1989. Requests for reprints may be addressed to Bruce A. Thyer, School of Social Work, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602.

entire book, the wealth of experience and practice wisdom Ginsburg acquired during the 20 years she spent as a school social worker in Chicago's public schools. Her suggestions on how to promote positive relationships with the teaching staff are practical and astute.

Part III on methods focuses upon elementary principles of behavior analysis, such as how to define problems in a manner that lends itself to reliable and valid measurement, deciding how, when, and where to collect data, determining reliability of data, contingency contracting, the use of self-monitoring, and teacher and parent training in the correct administration of contingencies. A separate section deals with behavior analysis conducted in small group settings.

The final portion of the book presents four case studies conducted by Ginsburg and school social work interns whom she supervised. The cases involve improving the prosocial behavior and time on-task of a 6-year-old Cuban boy, reducing the incidence of fire-setting by an 11-year-old, improving the on-task time of a 7-year-old hyperactive boy, and reducing disruptive classroom behavior of a 10-year-old child. The behavioral programs employed include an individualized token economy, parent training using Patterson and Gullion's (1976) text, group contingency management, and the differential reinforcement of other behavior. The experimental designs employed include an A-B-A design, A-B design (for fire-setting), and A-B-A-B and A-B-A-B-C-D designs.

Since *School Social Work* is basically an introduction to behavior analysis and is intended for a professional audience relatively unfamiliar with this field, the sophisticated behavior analyst will find

little in this book that is novel. It remains noteworthy however, as a fine integration of two fields which have much to gain from one another.

The book could have benefited by including more examples of paperwork forms commonly used in behavior analysis, as well as more traditional school social work activities, such as a completed social assessment and a completed Individual Educational Plan. Ginsburg's decision to exclusively use the pronoun "she" when referring to the school social worker and "he" with respect to troubled pupils, while understandable given the demographics of the field, seems a bit anachronistic, at least to this male reviewer. The market for this text is clearly intended for graduate and undergraduate students specializing in school social work, and it should serve them well as an introduction to the field. Persons with existing skills in behavior analysis would be better served by seeking out a more sophisticated book related to practice in school settings, such as Ninness and Glenn (1988).

## REFERENCES

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